



U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

October 2002

## **Bottled Water Distribution to End October 30**

October 30, 2002 will be the last day the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) distributes bottled water to residents near the abandoned Alder Mill site. As discussed at the September 12 public meeting, EPA looked closely at results from spring 2002 tests at the site. The agency did not find evidence linking arsenic in private drinking water wells in the area to the mill site or to another source.

Because the spring 2002 tests did not conclusively link the arsenic to a source, and because arsenic occurs naturally throughout the area, EPA concluded that the arsenic in groundwater occurs naturally. As EPA's Superfund program can only be used to cover costs to address contaminants from a source, EPA cannot pay for bottled water or pay for drinking water treatment systems.

EPA encourages citizens who have arsenic in their drinking water measuring 10 parts per billion (ppb) or above to take steps to limit their exposure. See section on page 2, "What You Can Do to Limit Your Exposure to Arsenic" for more information on options.

### **Background:**

#### **Arsenic in Drinking Water**

In May 2001, The Okanogan County Health District, in co-operation with the Washington State Department of Ecology and EPA, found levels of arsenic above 10 ppb in six private drinking water wells near Twisp, Washington. A total of 54 wells and two springs have been tested, revealing arsenic concentrations ranging from below detection limits to over 500 ppb. Nineteen homes were found with arsenic levels in their private drinking water wells measuring above 10 ppb. EPA has been temporarily supplying bottled water to these 19 residents, until tests could determine whether the arsenic was naturally-occurring or related to a discharge from the Alder Mill site or another site.

## **What You Can Do to Limit Your Exposure to Arsenic**

### **In-Home Drinking Water Treatment Systems: Residents Can Purchase Drinking Water Treatment**

Residents can purchase drinking water treatment systems for their faucets that can lower the amount of arsenic in the drinking water to below 10 ppb. The installed cost of a sink-mounted treatment system is about \$1,000 - \$1,500, depending on its size and complexity. All treatment systems should be approved by the National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) for arsenic removal. Residents would need to test and maintain these systems, which is expected to cost about \$100 per year for each treatment device.

### **You May Choose to Purchase Bottled Water**

More information on available bottled water can be obtained by looking up vendors in the yellow pages, or by contacting Doug Hale of the Okanogan County Health District at (509) 422-7140, or toll-free (within Okanogan County): 1-800-222-6410.

### **Educational Resources**

If you would like more information on health risks from arsenic, please call Doug Hale of the Okanogan County Health District (see number above).

### **About Arsenic**

Arsenic is a naturally-occurring chemical element that is normally found in water, soil, and rocks. Arsenic can also result from refining metals. To better protect public health, EPA has lowered the standard for arsenic in drinking water ("maximum contaminant level") from 50 parts per billion (ppb) to 10 ppb.

Long-term exposure to high levels of arsenic is known to increase the risk of developing cancer of the bladder, lung, skin, liver, kidney, and prostate. Other health effects may include high blood pressure, narrowing of the blood vessels, peripheral nerve damage, anemia, diabetes, stomach upset, and skin changes.

### **Site History**

The Alder Mill site is an abandoned ore-concentrating mill for gold and copper. It is on a 75-acre plot just outside Twisp, Washington, next to the Methow River. Two ponds, covering about 10 acres of the site, were historically used to store wastewater and silt from the mill's operation. This disposal practice took place from 1949 until the mill was abandoned in 1952.

An Ecology study and the EPA assessment indicate that surface soil at the mill site and mill ponds contains high levels of arsenic, lead, and other metals. The studies also indicate that naturally-occurring concentrations of arsenic in soil, rock, and water are locally high.

## **Contact Information**

### **EPA Contacts:**

*For technical questions about the site, please call:*

**David Rees**, Project Manager

at **(206) 553-1808**

E-mail: [rees.david@epa.gov](mailto:rees.david@epa.gov)

*For information about how to become involved, please call:*

**Debra Sherbina**, Community Involvement Coordinator

at **(206) 553-0247**

E-mail: [sherbina.debra@epa.gov](mailto:sherbina.debra@epa.gov)

You may also reach EPA through our toll free number: **1-800-424-4372**

### **County and State Contacts:**

Doug Hale

Okanogan County Health District

**(509) 422-7140**, or toll-free (*within Okanogan County*): **1-800-222-6410**

Rick Roeder

Washington State Department of Ecology

**(509) 454-7837**

The Administrative Record for the site (documents supporting EPA decisions) is available for your review at the **Twisp Community Center, 201 S. Methow Valley Highway**. Phone number: **(509) 997-2926**.

EPA's Internet homepage: <http://www.epa.gov/r10earth>

A web page has been developed for the Alder Mill Site.

Go to: <http://yosemite.epa.gov/r10/cleanup.nsf/sites/alder>

*For people with disabilities: please call Debra Sherbina at 206-553-0247 (toll-free 1-800-424-4372) if you have any special requests for reasonable accommodations. For TTY users: please call the Federal Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339 and give the operator Debra Sherbina's phone number.*